DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 158 320 CS 204 316

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TITLE Mass Communication and Voter Volatility.
PUB DATE Aug 78
NOTE 33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (61st, Seattle, Washington, August 13-16, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Change; *Changing Attitudes; Information Dissemination; Mass Media; Media Research; *Newspapers; Persuasive Discourse; *Political Attitudes; *Television; *Television Viewing; *Voting

ABSTRACT

Personal interviews were conducted with 353 eligible voters in Madison, Wisconsin, in October 1976, and repeated with all but 30 after election day to examine the correlation between voters' age, paper reading (especially public affairs), and television watching (especially public affairs), and the amount of behavioral volatility (voter abstention, unstable party affiliation, and openness to alternatives) and subjective volatility (contingent voting, antiparty sentiment, conflict and indecision, and compromise). The study specifically measured the contribution of media (especially television) to voter volatility, the unidimensionality of volatility, and the various normative aspects of volatility (single subjective dimension or several dimensions). Results indicated that both behavioral and subjective volatility are multidimensional rather than unidimensional. Education did not predict either kind of volatility very well; political interest had more consistent nonvolatile effects, except as reflected in conflict and indecision; and both television viewing time and public affairs viewing had little effect on volatility. Among the younger respondents there was a stronger correlation between public affairs viewing time and volatility than among the older subjects. (TJ)

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MASS COMMUNICATION AND VOTER VOLATILITY

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August 1978

Paper presented to the Theory and Methodology Division, Association for Education in Journalism Annual Convention, Seattle, Wash., August, 1978

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Mass Communication and Voter Volatility

The term "volatility" has been used to describe the apparent increasing electoral instability of democratic political systems of Western Europe and America (Blumler, 1975). This tendency toward unpredictability and rapid change of sentiment and power is manifested by aggregate trends in a variety of indicators: the declining strength of the major political parties, the rising abstention rates and split-ticket voting, and the weakening trust in governmental institutions. While there is abundant evidence from aggregate voting statistics and from the marginal percentages of public opinion polls that such trends exist, the more difficult tasks of identifying the causes and consequences of volatility have barely begun. As Blumler puts it, "electoral volatility poses a challenge which public opinion researchers and communication scholars have more often avoided than accepted" (p.1).

Electoral volatility is important to communication researchers for two reasons. First, several theorists have speculated that the advent of television in the post World War II years contributed to the growth of volatility. Second, the growing volatility may have consequences for the use of media in election campaigns. The planning of media formats for campaigns may benefit from understanding these new political patterns. In the present research, we address the first of these issues.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Before turning to the central issue of the relationship between mass media use and electoral instability, it is necessary to understand the elusive nature of the volatility concept and the diverse sources of evidence relevant to its alleged growth. Such evidence can be organized into two parts, directly, through movement of the relevant indicators of volatility and indirectly, through changes in the social forces thought to influence political stability.

GROWTH OF VOLATILITY

The declining influence of the major political parties is a critical part of the argument for increasing electoral volatility. A slow but steady movement away from identifying with either of the two major parties began as early as 1940 in the United States. According to Gallup poll data, only 20% of eligible voters considered themselves as Independents in 1940. The proportion averaged 23% from 1950 to 1965, and has hovered around 33% during the past decade (Gallup Poll Index, 1978).

Additionally, the effect of party affiliation on voting behavior is apparently less for those Americans who retain party labels. Dreyer (1971-72) has shown a steady downward trend across five successive Presidential elections, from 1952 to 1968, in the capacity of party affiliation to predict vote direction. Others have documented the rise in split ticket voting (DeVries and Tarrance, 1972).

In the multiparty systems of Western Europe, there has been a growing trend toward increased rates of party switching and toward splinter party voting. Thomsen and Sauerberg (1975) report a doubling of party switching in Denmark. Similar tendencies have been reported in Germany, Norway, Sweden and the low countries (Blumler, 1975). Butler and Stokes (1974) concluded that in Britain the 1960s revealed "far greater volatility of party support" than did the early post-war years as evidenced by more violent between-election fluctuations in public opinion poll support, bigger swing margins in successive elections, and by recent gains by the Liberal and the Nationalist parties.

Rising rates of abstention from voting represent a second indicator of growing instability. Turnout in U.S. Presidential elections has declined since 1960, although here as elsewhere it is difficult to estimate how much of this decline is due to voter disenchantment with the political system and how much to the perceived quality of the candidates. In earlier literature (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954), the predictability of vote turnout patterns was held to be an element of political stability in that nonvoting was consistently higher

among the young, the less educated and the less advantaged. This has been challenged by analyses of British voting patterns that showed a strong pattern of "contingent abstention" (nonvoting by those who had a party choice before the campaign) among those who were relatively interested in politics (Blumler and McLeod, 1974). This movement in and out of the voting population clearly operates as a force for volatility in the political system.

Another element of electoral volatility involves cognitions about the political system rather than overt behavior. For example, there has been a pronounced secular decline in political trust in the U.S. since 1958 (Miller, Brown and Raine, 1973; Miller, 1974). While Watergate appears to have played a role in the rising mistrust, Harris poll data suggest the decline was already in evidence before the Nixon scandal (McLeod, Brown and Becker, 1977).

CHANGES IN STABILIZING FORCES

Traditional models of voting behavior have portrayed political stability emanating from the "inheritance" of parental voting patterns (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948). While the 1940 data may have supported this notion, the models appear much less applicable today. Jennings and Niemi (1968) report that American high school students "were no simple carbon copies of their parents." Our own research found a similarly low although statistically significant transmission of political party identification, but virtually no agreement between parents and their adolescent children on liberal-conservative orientation and political system values such as efficacy and trust (McLeod, O'Keefe and Wackman, 1969). If adolescents show only weak parental transmission effects, we would expect even less stability later when they move out of the home. British data show only 60% of first-time voters followed their parents' preferences and this rate was even lower in subsequent elections (Blumler, 1974).

Another cornerstone of the Lazarsfeld et al. voting behavior model was the stabilizing impact of "predispositions" generated by social status, religious affiliation, rural or urban membership, etc. Although the predictive power of these

status indicators may vary from election to election, it is likely the prediction is less solid than it was a quarter-century ago (Nie, Verba and Petrocik, 1976). Increased geographical mobility and other secular changes may be at work. Similarly, Blumler (1974) reports that the traditional power of social class voting in Britain is on the wane. To the extent that these stabilizing forces diminish and new forces affecting short term flows of influence increase, volatility should become greater. New media patterns, particularly the role of television, is seen as being a key source of influence on volatility.

THEORETICAL AMBIGUITIES

There is an impressive collection of evidence for the rise of volatility along with a decline in forces stabilizing electoral behavior in Western Europe as well as in America. We should, however, acknowledge a considerable degree of ambiguity in the theoretical underpinnings of the concepts. It is not clear, for example, what the implications of high volatility are for the long term functioning of the political system. If it simply implies that the traditional forces influencing voting patterns have given way to new ones, then the future impact is likely to be less than if the system has become inherently unpredictable. If the electoral functioning is inherently unpredictable, then it is important to learn if volatility also implies that the system is made more vulnerable to other aspects of instability such as mass movements and revolutions or perhaps, alienation.

The answers to these questions about the meaning of volatility are obviously dependent upon understanding what has replaced the old model of stable party politics. Political scientists have invoked the concept of "issue voting" to characterize the new emphasis (Key, 1966; RePass, 1971; Pomper, 1972), but its implications for volatility are not very clear. First, it is very difficult to disentangle issue voting from party voting (Converse, 1975) so as to understand the consequences of each. Second, issue voting has very different connotations if we view it as being compatible with an elaborate model of rational choice (Downs, 1957) than if it signifies a volatile situation dependent upon what issues are made salient in a given campaign. Recent campaigns have demonstrated the latter view.

Another source of ambiguity is the hidden assumption that volatility is a unitary phenomenon with common antecedents and common consequences. Much of the evidence for increasing volatility comes from marginal percentages and aggregate statistics. Thus there is no easy way to determine whether the trends toward voter independence, abstention, split-ticket voting, and declining political trust are functionally interdependent and changing most rapidly in the same groups of people. The question of unidimensionality vs. multidimensionality is examined as a major question in the present research.

Although volatility is conceived as a state or property of the political system, its relationship to individual beliefs and attitudes is nonetheless important to the question of whether volatility is a transient phenomenon reflective of temporary social conditions or a more enduring characteristic of the political scene. Is it also represented and enhanced by normative acceptance of individual citizens regardless of their own political behavior? If volatile cognitions lead to volatile behavior, then it is much more likely that volatility will become a relatively enduring or even growing state of affairs than if abstention and independent voting are accepted only by those who practice it. For that reason, our research focuses on the subjective or normative aspects of electoral volatility.

Finally, there is considerable ambiguity about the origins of volatility. To what extent does it reflect changes in the behaviors of individuals previously loyal to parties? Alternatively, to what extent does the increase reflect the entry of large numbers of young people into the voting population who were politically socialized during the disillusioning years of Vietnam and Watergate? Without adequate longitudinal and/or cohort data the question is impossible to answer directly. It is also unclear whether the source of the volatility lies more in the cognitions of the voters or in the inability of the major political parties to find attractive candidates and to find issues that will satisfy groups of voters without alienating others. The theoretical and methodological difficulties are great, but clearly the first step must be to identify the dimensions of volatility and to ascertain their antecedents and consequences.

MASS MEDIA AND VOLATILITY

While there are many potential causes of the new patterns of electoral volatility, the most important for us is the possibility that the mass media, and particularly television, may have played an important role in the rising instability. The most obvious piece of evidence is also the least scientifically satisfying. The development of television as the dominant medium during the 1950s and 60s coincided with the beginnings of political volatility in America and Europe. It has been repeatedly stated that the current generation of young people is the first to grow up weaned on television. Additionally, it is noted that they are more likely to be volatile than are older voters. Before making any causal inference, however, we need to compare the present voter cohort with earlier cohorts to assess their relative instability. More importantly, we need to tie actual patterns of television use and other media behaviors to indicators of volatility before functional statements can be made.

A theoretical argument stronger than mere historical coincidence can be made to link television and volatility. That is the logical presumption that if party, status and family forces toward stability are weakening, then the potential for media influence is greater (Blumler, 1975). Another indirect source of reasoning comes from findings that locate patterns of volatility in a broad spectrum of the public (Butler and Stokes, 1974) and in the relatively well informed independent voters (Pomper, 1975). These broad patterns of change suggest effects on audiences that are most likely to be reached by television rather than by more selective influence processes. In contrast to the more stable patterns of print media use, there appears to be a high level of "drop-in viewing" of political television programming, particularly when the political material is broadcast in prime time preempting other regular programs (Blumler and McQuail, 1968; Katz, 1971).

The theoretical case, then, is that television is at once a mass medium, a public medium, and a medium "above the battle" (Blumler, 1975). It is a mass medium in that it reaches essentially apolitical people not reached by other media. It is a public medium in that it does not let the parties dominate and thereby legitimates a broad spectrum of opinion not capturable by any given party. Finally, television places

itself above the battle by contrasting its own issue focus to the conflict between political parties and by debunking the mighty. Particularly in many European countries, television's relative neutrality can be contrasted to the one sided messages of the partisan press (Butler and Stokes, 1974). In various ways these qualities make a reasonable theoretical case for those people most exposed to television being the most likely to exhibit volatility.

Direct evidence regarding the media-volatility relationship is ambiguous and inconsistent. Volatility has not been investigated as a complex multivariate phenomenon; rather the findings from any given study have tended to relate media use to a single dependent variable bearing an uncertain connection to the larger issues of volatility. For example, the finding that audiences may learn political information from a given media source is relevant to volatility only if we assume that knowledge gains are apt to function to stabilize other aspects of the person's political behavior (e.g., foster participation, make voting more consistent).

Another source of ambiguity in the literature is the variance in the measurement of the independent variable, mass media exposure. Some assertions of volatility effects refer to the mass media in general while others focus more specifically on television. Some statements are based on the total amount of television use while others are phrased as television relative to use of the print media. Some deal with exposure to the content of television (e.g., news, entertainment) while others are more general in referring to the amount of time spent with the medium while still others are stated in terms of absolute or relative dependency on a given medium. It is clear that the nature of the media stimulus is an unresolved problem in the analysis of volatility.

A final source of ambiguity comes from type of evidence that is used. The majority of findings are based on data from cross-section surveys taken at a single time point. As a result, the causal order of variables is often clouded. Longitudinal studies using panel data are better able to handle causal direction problems by using time-one levels of the dependent political variables as prior controls. It must be remembered, however, that in doing so they deal with the <u>increments</u> of political behavior accruing between the pre- and post-testing rather than with <u>absolute levels</u> of the dependent measures.

It should not be surprising, then, that the relevant literature is often inconsistent. The early Columbia university voting studies (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Berelson et al., 1954) reported that the dominant effect of the (pre-television) media in the 1940 and 1948 campaigns was to reinforce the already committed voters through the mechanism of selective exposure. A lesser effect was noted in the mobilization of uncommitted voters who subsequently tended to vote consistently with their demographic predispositions. Both of these effects would have served to reduce volatility and hence could be expected to lessen as later electoral campaigns became more centered on television. But research on the later campaigns appears to indicate a reverse trend. Converse (1966) studied the early television campaign of 1952 and found that the highest rates of voting change occurred among those using a moderate number of media. But studies of later campaigns where television dominated failed to replicate the Converse finding and indeed showed some evidence that "floating voters" were concentrated among those using the fewest media (Dreyer, 1971-72; Dobson and St.Angelo, 1975). None of these studies, however, tests the television-volatility relationship directly. The effect of television may have been obscured in its being reduced to "use vs. non-use" comparisons or subsumed in a "number of media" index in which the overwhelming proportion of respondents were classified as campaign television users despite the likelihood of widespread variation in intensity of use.

If we assume that mistrust implies volatility, then we have some evidence that volatility is fostered by television dependence and reduced by newspaper dependence. This evidence comes from a series of studies that have examined the implications of dependency on television. Robinson (1976) concludes that those dependent on television for political information were more likely than others to mistrust government officials. He attributes such opinions as outcomes of a "television malaise." Although Robinson's results held after the introduction of education as control, Miller, Erbring and Goldenberg (1976), using the same data set, could find little support for Robinson's contentions. Reconciliation of the two sets of conclusions is made difficult by the mists that lie between evidence and inference, although the latter group's analysis appears more persuasive. Providing some clarification of the issue, Becker and Whitney (1978) found television dependence to be related to low levels of trust in local

government while dependence on newspapers was tied to higher trust. Results for trust in national government although in the same direction failed to reach significance.

Other evidence may be considered as at least indirectly supportive of the television-volatility connection. Among a panel of young voters in Britain, Blumler (1975) found that those who changed party allegiance between 1970 and 1974 were more likely than others to have viewed partisan party broadcasts. Other research with the same sample found mixed results when looking at vote abstention as a form of volatility (Blumler and McLeod, 1974). Among those who had a party preference prior to the campaign, media use seemed to play varied roles in producing both turnout and abstention. In a quantitative sense, there was a tendency for those who watched political programs to remain loyal to their original party choice by voting on election day. Second, the compatibility or incompatibility of the young voter's information sources, such as the editorial position of their daily newspaper with their pre-campaign sentiments, was associated with voting and with abstention. Finally, a qualitative role was identified such that those who reacted negatively to their party leader's television performance were more likely than others to stay home from the polls. It is this last role that appears to support the contention that television fosters volatility.

Findings that show the print media strengthening the stability of the political system are consistent with the television-volatility formulation. McLeod, Brown, Becker and Ziemke (1977) found that young persons who followed the Watergate hearings in the print media were more likely than others to see the scandals as atypical and to blame Nixon without generalizing the guilt to the political system. No effects of viewing the televised hearings were found. Robinson (1974) did find effects of watching the hearings in the form of increased hostility to government. It is not clear, however, whether these perceptions generalized to volative electoral behavior.

It is apparent that much more evidence is required before accepting the broad inference that changing media patterns have contributed to increasing electoral volatility. We need to study volatility as a complex phenomenon, subsuming a variety of behaviors and cognitions. On the independent variable side, we must reject crude indexes such as "number of media used" that confound amount and diversity of exposure

and measure exposure to specific content within a given medium. Finally, controls for pre-exposure and for possible third variable explanations of television-volatility relationships are required before strong inferences can be made.

Our current research attempts to answer four questions about electoral volatility:

1. Do the diverse types of behaviors subsumed under the volatility concept form a unidimensional scale or are these behaviors multidimensional?

2. Similarly, do the various cognitions about the normative aspects of volatility form a single subjective dimension or are several dimensions involved?

3. How is subjective volatility related to behavioral volatility?

4. How are the various patterns of television and print media use related to behavioral and subjective volatility? Do we find evidence of a "television malaise" with respect to volatility?

METHOD

During late October of 1976, hour long personal interviews were conducted with 353 eligible voters in Madison, Wisconsin. All but 30 of these respondents were again contacted by telephone in the weeks following election day. Since the main purpose of our larger research program was to analyze the political communication of younger voters, persons under 27 years old were over-represented in our samples.

For that reason, the young and older voters are treated separately in our analyses.

The measurement of behavioral volatility was comprised of eight items focused on the 1976 presidential campaign: the October measure of likelihood of voting in the presidential race; the post-election report of whether the person actually had voted; the report of turnout in the April presidential primary; the degree of shifting in vote preference during the campaign; the amount of split-ticket voting across races in the November election; the period of the campaign when the presidential vote decision was made; the likelihood of voting for a third party candidate; and whether the person ever considered voting for someone other than their present choice.

We attempted to measure the subjective or normative aspects of volatility by devising twelve new items that reflected the various statements that have been made about how the public might react cognitively in a volatile or nonvolatile manner. A five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree was used. The items are listed in Table 2.

In addition, a measure used in the Leeds research (Blumler and McQuail, 1968; Blumler and McLeod, 1974) was included in the subjective volatility analysis: "Some people say that you should vote only if you want to. Others say that everybody has a duty to vote. What do you think: that you should vote only if you want to or that it is a duty."

Media use was measured in two major ways: by time spent with different media and by the use of various types of content. Time spent with television was the respondent's estimate of hours spent with that medium on an average weeknight. Exposure to newspapers was indexed by the number of days per week the respondent read a paper. Content was divided into public affairs and entertainment categories. For television, public affairs viewing was the frequency of watching national news, local news and news specials, while entertainment viewing was a compilation of time

spent with movies, crime and adventure shows, situation comedies, and music and variety shows. Newspaper public affairs use included the frequency of reading about local and state government and politics, and international affairs. Entertainment newspaper use consisted of reading stories about ordinary people, crime and accidents, and sports.

Control variables used were education and general political interest. The former was measured by the number of school years completed, while interest was gauged by a four-point scale ranging from very interested to not at all interested.

RESULTS

Behavioral Volatility

The dimensionality of behavioral volatility was examined by subjecting the eight behavioral items to factor analysis using a principal components solution with varimax rotation. It is apparent from Table 1 that behavioral volatility is not unidimensional. Three distinctive factors emerge which together account for 51% of the total variance. The first factor includes the three items dealing with vote turnout in the Spring primary and in the November election. We have labeled this the Vote Abstention factor. Independent of the act of voting, the second factor includes two items dealing with the choice between candidates: the amount of change during the campaign and the degree of ticket-splitting across the races. Lateness of voting decision also has a minor loading. We call this an Unstable Party Affiliation factor. The third factor, Openness to Alternatives, combines two items: the likelihood of voting for a third party candidate had the candidate been closer to the respondent's beliefs and whether the person had considered voting for another candidate since the primaries.

The finding of multidimensionality through factor analysis might be challenged on the grounds that such procedures maximize the chances for more than one factor to emerge. The raw correlations of items across factors is an alternative way of evaluating the independence of factors. Our results averaging the cross-factor correlations support the independence inference. The average cross-factor or external

correlation is only .035, compared with an average within-factor internal correlation of .181 for the three behavioral factors.[1]

--Table 1 about here--

Subjective Volatility

It is also clear that subjective volatility is multidimensional in structure (Table 2). Four independent dimensions emerge from a factor analysis of the 13 subjective volatility items. The first concerns the act of voting. This Contingent Voting factor, accounting for 15.3% of the total variance, includes the items: not urging reluctant voters to go to the polls, rejecting the concept of a duty to vote; and not voting if the candidates don't have appeal. A second factor, called Anti-Party, accounts for 12.5% of the total variance. The discouragement of voting solely on the basis of party, the importance of issue voting over party and candidate voting, split-ticket voting, and the rationality of the independent voter comprise this factor. The undesirability of party conflict also has a low loading on the factor. It would appear, then, that the act of voting and patterns of voting are two different subjective factors much the same as was reflected in the behavioral factors in Table 1.

A third factor, tentatively called Conflict and Indecision, accounts for 11.9% of the subjective volatility variance. As shown in Table 2, volatility here is the rejecting of four statements: that independents are indecisive, that we would be better off without party conflict, that people should be able to decide early, and that it is important to work for one party. The final Anti-Compromise factor, accounting for 9.3% of the variance, is made up of two items. The first, that it is important to vote for the better of two mediocre candidates, loads negatively as expected; however, the other item, "no political party should stay in office for more than ten years," also loads negatively as a non-volatility item. This makes sense in the context that respondents high on this factor may wish to retain their attitudinal integrity even if it means keeping the dominant party in office. The factor also has a weak loading for split-ticket voting.

--Table 2 about here--

The item analysis of the cross-factor correlations corroborates the independence of the subjective volatility factors as it did for the behavioral volatility dimensions. The average external cross-factor correlation is .015, as compared with an average within-factor coefficient of .201. Since there are relatively few items on each of the four dimensions and the internal coefficients are not very high, it is obvious that more items should be developed and used in future research.

Because our sampling rates for young (ages 18-27) and for older voters differ, it was necessary to conduct the remaining analyses separately. Since this supresses any effect of age differences it is desirable to consider these before moving on to the other analyses. Agreement within the research literature that younger voters should be more volatile makes it possible to consider the analysis of age differences on the volatility dimensions as rough tests of pragmatic validity (not shown in tables). For behavioral volatility, the younger are significantly more volatile on Vote Abstention ($t=2.60$, $p<.01$) and on Openness to Alternatives ($t=4.15$, $p<.001$), but not on the Unstable Party factor ($t=.07$, n.s.). In terms of specific items, it appears that the younger were more volatile than older voters except for three items: change in presidential preference during the campaign, split-ticket voting, and consideration of other alternatives. The largest differences were shown in younger voters being less likely to vote in the primary and more likely to consider voting for a third party.

Age differences were shown on two of the subjective volatility factors (not shown in tables). The younger were significantly higher on Contingent Voting ($t=3.76$, $p<.001$) and on Conflict and Indecision ($t=3.77$, $p<.001$), and marginally so on the Anti-Party factor ($t=1.83$, $p<.10$). No difference was found on the Anti-Compromise dimension. ($t=1.62$, n.s.). Reasonably large differences were present for most items; the largest differences were for the young to be less likely to see a duty to vote, to say you shouldn't vote if you don't like the candidates, to reject the idea that you should pick one party and work for it, and to disagree with the idea that independents are weak and indecisive. No differences between age groups were found for rejecting voting only by party, for calling independents rational, and for accepting party

conflict. The age differences, then, give some support to the pragmatic validity of most of our behavioral and subjective volatility dimensions and items.

RELATIONSHIP OF VOLATILITY TYPES

The next step in the analysis was to examine the relationship between the behavioral and subjective dimensions of volatility. Since our theoretical model placed subjective volatility before behavioral outcomes and the latter measures were confined to the 1976 campaign, we treated the three behavioral volatility dimensions as dependent variables in regression analyses. Given that the first factor in each volatility type dealt with the act of voting, it is not surprising that subjective Contingent Voting tends to predict behavioral Vote Abstention (Table 3). This is significant for the young voters and marginally so for the older group. We also expected the subjective Anti-Party factor to predict to Unstable Party Affiliation, but this holds only for older respondents. The third behavioral factor, Openness to Alternatives, is predicted by Anti-Compromise among the younger group but by the last three subjective factors for older respondents. Overall, the fact that four of the six R^2 coefficients are statistically significant and another is marginally predictive indicates a reasonable correspondence of the two types of volatility. The relationship is not so high, however, as to merit either ignoring behavioral and subjective volatility or combining the two into a single set of indices.

--Table 3 about here--

MEDIA USE AND VOLATILITY

The volatility literature suggests that the emerging pattern of television as the dominant source of political information has contributed to growing electoral instability. We reasoned from this theoretical statement that the more the person uses television rather than newspapers for political information, the more likely he or she is to exhibit behavioral and subjective volatility. This should hold for time spent with and for use of public affairs content in the two media. If there is

any validity to the assertion that exposure to entertainment television numbs the interest in the outside world for the "inadvertent" audience (Robinson, 1976), then we might expect higher volatility rates would be shown for those using entertainment content most frequently. No particular expectation was held for the reading of entertainment news.

Education and political interest were used as control variables so as to minimize the possibility that any media relationships to volatility might be simple an outcome of greater knowledge of or proximity to the political system. The previous literature would suggest that both education and political interest should be related to greater attention to print media and to public affairs content among our media variables and to lower levels of volatility as well. The zero-order correlations in Table 4 give only partial support to these expectations. Education is related to spending less time with television, but clearly so for older respondents only. This may account for the relationship to public affairs television that is negative for the older respondents but positive for the young. As expected, education is associated with less interest in entertainment content for both age levels. Years of schooling shows no relationship to behavioral volatility, however, and displays only mixed results for subjective volatility. A reversal is shown for the Conflict and Indecision factor where the higher educated are less likely than others to endorse the anti-volatility (stability) items that stressed choice, harmony and working within a single party.

Political interest is somewhat more consistent than education in being tied to print media use and public affairs content (Table 4). As expected, it is associated with lower levels of behavioral volatility, although this holds only among the older respondents. It tends to be tied to low subjective volatility, but among young people interest is reversed (as was education) in being related to high levels of Conflict and Compromise. Overall, the correlation patterns make education and political interest appear to be reasonable controls for later analyses.

--Table 4 about here--

Regression analyses were conducted for each of the seven volatility dimensions. The major focus was on two sets of media variables: exposure time, using separate

television and newspaper measures; and content use, four variables formed by public affairs and entertainment use within the television and newspaper media. Each set was first analyzed as a block without controls and then with education and political interest included as controls. In the latter analyses, education and political interest were introduced as the first block with the two sets of media variables being added as a second block to explain variance not accounted for by the two controls (Kerlinger and Pedhazur, 1973). The results for the first set of time measures are shown in Table 5.

--Table 5 about here--

There is no support for the assertion that time spent with television should increase behavioral volatility (Table 5). In fact, television time is associated with lower levels of Unstable Party Affiliation and Openness to Alternatives among the younger respondents. Consistent with the volatility formulation, newspaper reading is negatively related to Vote Abstention among younger respondents, but interestingly, it is tied to <u>higher</u> volatility in terms of Unstable Party Affiliation. That is, the more frequent newspaper readers are more likely than other young people to turn out to vote but at the same time are more likely to have changed presidential preferences and to have split their tickets.

Political interest is rather consistently associated with lower levels of behavioral volatility while education shows little relationship (Table 5). Another noticeable pattern is that while the media relationships to behavioral volatility tended to be stronger among the young, accounting for an average of 3.8% of the incremental variance compared to 0.8% for older respondents, the impact of political interest is stronger for the older group (averaging 4.5% of the variance vs. 1.5% for the young).

With respect to subjective volatility, the pattern of relationship with television time is somewhat mixed. Among the young, heavy viewing is marginally related to supportive attitudes toward contingent voting but, conversely, is also tied

to low levels of Conflict and Indecision. Heavy viewing older respondents are low on volatility on both Contingent Voting and Conflict and Indecision before control, but controls for education and political interest reduce these well below significance levels. Controls also erase the positive relationship between television exposure and the Anti-Party factor. Overall, the pattern is for television exposure to reduce rather than increase levels of subjective volatility.

Frequency of newspaper reading shows only two significant relationships to subjective volatility among the eight comparisons in Table 5. It is associated with Anti-Party sentiments but also with lower levels on the Arti-Compromise factor. Both these relationships are among the young where the average variance in subjective volatility accounted for by the two media variables is 3.2% contrasted to 0.7% for older respondents.

It is not clear whether these media time relationships reflect the effects of exposure to a given medium per se, or whether the impact reflects use of a given type of content within that medium. For that reason, we divided the content of television and newspapers into public affairs and entertainment categories. The analyses are shown in Table 6. The relationship between newspaper use and lower levels of behavioral Vote Abstention among young respondents is clearly a function of reading of public affairs content rather than entertainment. Exposure to television news also shows a marginal effect of lower Vote Abstention among the young. Younger respondents also exhibit differences on Openness to Alternatives where television public affairs viewing is linked to lower levels of behavioral volatility while newspaper hard news reading produces higher levels. Among older respondents on Unstable Party Affiliation, the two media again have reverse effects with television news viewing tending to be associated with higher volatility and newspaper public affairs reading with lower levels.

--Table 6 about here--

The relationship between use of media content and subjective volatility tends to be concentrated in the first Contingent Voting dimension (Table 6). The use of

public affairs material in both media results in lower levels of Contingent Voting with television operating more strongly for the young and newspapers having more impact on older respondents. The only other significant incremental R^2 test is shown for younger respondents in the analysis of the Conflict and Indecision factor before controls. Exposure to televised entertainment content is related to lower levels of volatility while newspaper public affairs is tied to higher levels. Overall, the amount of variance in subjective volatility accounted for by the four media content items is not very impressive. The relationships that are observable tend to be concentrated in the public affairs columns and are more often than not in the direction of lower volatility.

CONCLUSIONS

We began with a definition of volatility as the degree of unpredictability of election outcomes from demographic and political system allegiances and values which has as its consequence relatively rapid changes in the holding of power.[2] This definition poses problems for the researcher who wants to understand the relationship of volatility to mass media processes. First, it is a property of the political system rather than of individuals and is best studied with careful cohort analyses using comparable data gathered over relatively long periods of time. Cross section surveys and short-term longitudinal panels provide less satisfying sources of data.

Second, unpredictability is a function of the relationship of variables rather than a matter of level of any given variable. For example, the declining vote turnout in recent elections is a rough indicator of increasing behavioral volatility but it would be more important to show that the new abstention is less predictable by demographic factors (low education, etc.) and more a function of short-term situational forces than was the case at an earlier historical period. Such political data are difficult to obtain and the absence of appropriate media measures in earlier surveys make the pursuit impossible. Without appropriate historical data, we can use single time, cross-sectional data in meaningful way by assessing the relationship of communication variables to such behaviors as turnout, changing vote preferences, and

split-ticket voting within a given election. Measurement of the subjective or normative aspects of volatility may provide more stable indicators than the behavioral items whose stability may be more affected by the immediate election situation.

Our finding that both behavioral and subjective volatility are multidimensional rather than unidimensional do little to simplify the problems of those who might want to do further research on volatility. While we might want to ignore the third behavioral volatility factor, Openness to Alternatives, as relatively unimportant, it is necessary to conceptually separate the first two behavioral factors. That is, the act of voting must be separated from candidate choice in the consideration of volatility. Within the second factor, it is important to note that the amount of campaign indecision and change was highly related to the amount of split-ticket voting, a relationship that holds even when controlling for the strength of party affiliation.

The multidimensionality of subjective volatility is also important to note. The perceptions of norms regarding the act of voting was clearly independent of the judgment about voting on the basis of party and each is unrelated to the last two factors. It should be further noted that the patterns of prediction by education, political interest and media use are rather different for each of the volatility factors. For example, high education and political interest are related to low Anti-Party volatility but, conversely, to high Conflict and Indecision volatility.

We want to stress that we do not consider our measures of subjective volatility in any way final. They should be tested for their reliability over time as well as for their internal consistency that was the exclusive focus here. Additional items are needed that will buttress the dimensions shown here and perhaps uncover new ones. Future development should also include items which more clearly separate what the respondent him/herself believes and what the person believes is acceptable and/or desirable behavior in others.

In the development of a new scale, it is useful to consider its relation to other existing scales. In this case, political efficacy and political trust items were included in a factor analysis with the 13 subjective volatility items. In no case did any of the efficacy or trust items have substantial loadings on the volatility factors. A closer inspection using item analysis showed moderately high correlations for one of the efficacy items with the Contingent Voting items but otherwise there was little indication of overlap.

Prediction of volatility by education and political interest produced some surprising results. Education, which would be expected to decrease volatility according to traditional political communication models, did not predict either type of volatility very well. Where it was related to volatility, it was at least as likely to be related to higher as to lower levels of instability. Political interest had stronger and more consistently non-volatile effects, but at least one exception (Conflict and Indecision) was apparent. The politically interested were less accepting of criticism of independents, less likely to think we would be better off without so much fighting between parties, less convinced they should pick one party and try to improve it, etc. The highly educated were also more volatile on this dimension. These findings do not support the Lazarsfeld et al. models of the 1940s.

The findings for the role of television in the <u>volatizing</u> process may dissapoint those who hold that medium responsible for most of the world's difficulties. Both television time and the viewing of public affairs revealed a relatively small proportion of significant findings and entertainment watching had virtually no relationship to volatility. Even more damaging to the "television malaise" hypothesis is the finding that the majority of significant and marginally significant (.10 level) findings were in the direction of <u>lower</u> volatility. Only with respect to Unstable Party Affiliation among the older respondents was there a significant relationship in the predicted direction after controls were introduced. Television news' focus on candidate images may have facilitated change in vote preference between the two major candidates and perhaps increased split-ticket voting, but at the same time

did little to make third party alternatives more attractive and may have stimulated the act of voting among the young.

Newspaper use also failed to show the expected negative relationship to volatility. Its relationships were modest in size and balanced in direction. These relationships were concentrated among the young being associated with lower Voter Abstention but also with higher volatility on other measures. In particular contrast to television news findings, newspaper public affairs reading was related to greater Openness to Alternatives. It is likely that the press has greater space to devote to such alternatives.

The stronger media volatility relationships among the younger respondents does fit models of political communication that depict the media serving important socializing functions for younger people. It also is consonant with the volatility model that ascribes greater media impact to the current generation of younger voters. In any case, the finding of greater media exposure effects for the young is consistent with previous research (Blumler, 1975; McLeod and Becker, 1974). It should be remembered, however, that the young have much lower levels of public affairs media use and higher levels of volatility. There is no basis, therefore, for predicting lower volatility levels in the future based on our data.

The large proportion of nonsignificant findings in Tables 5 and 6 may suggest to some readers that the null hypothesis has once again triumphed. But we believe there are also enough significant findings, even after stringent controls, to justify further examination of the question of media effects on electoral instability. The research here was confined to questions of the antecedents of volatility. We have already begun to look at the other set of questions regarding the effects of volatility in the election campaign. Although the analysis is incomplete, we do have evidence that the impact of subjective volatility on the how and why of media use in the campaign is stronger than that of the antecedents of volatility examined here. These patterns of media uses and gratifications may then have had effects on voting and other political behavior.

NOTES

1. The internal consistency of each dimension was indexed by the average correlation ("internal") of items with high loadings on that dimension. Each item was assigned to the dimension on which it had its highest loading. The average "external" correlation was obtained by averaging the coefficients of a given item with all items not loading on that item's factor. The average internal and external levels were then obtained by averaging across all items. The same procedures were used for the subjective volatility items. Rather than using a sum of high loading items in the regression analyses, however, we used factor scores so as to maximize the independence of the dimensions.

2. We do not wish to imply with this definition that volatility is inherently undesirable or dysfunctional to the political system. Within the limits of how these power shifts might be carried out, we could argue that changes in power are necessary to the just society. While unpredicability is the natural enemy of the researcher, we are defining it here as the lack of prediction by standard demographic and political variables. The happy prospect is that with greater volatility, electoral behavior may be better predicted and understood by communication variables.

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TABLE 1

Factor Loadings of Attributes of Behavioral Volatility in the 1976 Campaign

	I Vote Abstention	II Unstable Party Affl.	III Openness to Alternatives
Vote Abstention factor			
Probability of voting in presidential campaign	-.80		
Reported turnout post-election	-.73		
Reported turnout in presidential primary	-.57		
Unstable Party Affiliation factor			
Change in presidential vote intention		.74	
Amount of split ticket voting		.73	
Time of decision for presidential choice (high = late)		(.31)	
Openness to Alternatives factor			
Likelihood of voting for third party candidate			.75
Considered voting for someone other than present choice			.66
Total variance accounted for:	20.0%	16.4	14.5 = 50.9%

N = 353 A principal components solution with varimax rotation was used. Loadings below .35 have been eliminated for simplicity. The sign of loadings for factor I have been reversed to show direction for volatility.

TABLE 2

Factor Loadings of Subjective Political Volatility Statements

	I Contingent Voting	II Anti-Party	III Conflict& Indecision	IV Anti-Compromise
Contingent Voting factor				
People who don't want to vote shouldn't be urged to vote	.79			
Everyone has a duty to vote	-.78			
If you don't like what you see of the candidates, you shouldn't vote at all	.69			
Anti-Party factor				
People shouldn't vote for a candidate if all they know is the party of the cand.		.65		
There is usually one issue that matters to me more than party or personal qualities		.57		
It is best not to vote for just one party's candidates on election day		.52		
People who call themselves independents are more rational and objective than those who join parties		.47		
Conflict & Indecision factor				
People who call themselves independents are really indecisive and unwilling to commit themselves			-.69	
We would be better off if there wasn't so much fighting between parties & cand.			-.55	
People ought to be able to make up their minds early in the campaign without waiting for all the hoopla			-.53	
It is important to choose one political party and work to improve it			-.53	
Anti-Compromise factor				
It's more important to vote for the better of two mediocre candidates than for somebody who doesn't have a chance to win				-.76
No political party should stay in office for more than ten years				-.55
Total variance accounted for:	15.3%	12.5	11.9	9.3 = 49.0%

N = 353 A principal components solution with varimax rotation was used. Loadings below .35 have been eliminated for simplicity. The signs for loadings on factors III and IV have been reversed to show direction for volatility.

TABLE 3

Behavioral Volatility in the 1976 Presidential Election Race:

Standardized Regression Coefficients of Subjectivity Dimensions

Dimension		Subjective Volatility Dimension: Contingent Voting	Anti-Party	Indecision	Anti-Compromise	Total Variance Acct. For
Vote Abstention	Young	.26[a]	.02	-.05	.11	.093[a]
	Older	.13[c]	-.04	.04	.10	.029
Unstable Party Affiliation	Young	-.13[c]	.11	.03	-.09	.043[c]
	Older	-.12	.22[a]	.03	.07	.073[b]
Openness to Alternatives	Young	.00	.06	.10	.24[a]	.062[b]
	Older	.06	.20[a]	.24[a]	.15[b]	.130[a]

N = 192 for young, 161 for older respondents. Significance is indicated at the .10 level by the letter c, at the .05 level by b, and at the .01 level by a.

TABLE 4

Zero-order Correlations of Education and Political Interest

Media Use Variables and Dimensions of Behavioral and Subjective Volatility

		Education	Political Interest
Media Use			
Time spent with television	Young	-.13[c]	-.13[c]
	Older	-.48[a]	.05
Frequency of newspaper reading	Young	.13[c]	.35[a]
	Older	-.05	.19[a]
Television: public affairs viewing	Young	.25[a]	.24[a]
	Older	-.22[a]	.16[b]
Television: entertainment viewing	Young	-.31[a]	-.25[a]
	Older	-.52[a]	-.15[c]
Newspapers: public affairs reading	Young	.29[a]	.53[a]
	Older	.27[a]	.57[a]
Newspapers: entertainment reading	Young	-.19[a]	-.21[a]
	Older	-.17[b]	.06
Behavioral Volatility			
Vote Abstention	Young	-.03	-.20[a]
	Older	.00	-.20[b]
Unstable Party Affiliation	Young	.08	-.05
	Older	-.09	-.22[a]
Openness to Alternatives	Young	-.11	.03
	Older	.11	-.20[b]
Subjective Volatility			
Contingent Voting	Young	.12[c]	-.14[c]
	Older	.08	-.10
Anti-Party	Young	-.08	-.19[a]
	Older	-.27[a]	-.13[c]
Conflict and Indecision	Young	.23[a]	.27[a]
	Older	.40[a]	.06
Anti-Compromise	Young	-.13[c]	.06
	Older	.06	-.17[b]

N = 192 for young, 161 for older respondents. Significance is indicated at the .10 level by the letter c, at the .05 level by b, and at the .01 level by a.

TABLE 5

Behavioral and Subjective Volatility: Standardized Regression Coefficients of Education, Political Interest and Television and Newspaper Time Variables

Volatility		Education	Political Interest	R^2	Television Time	Newspaper Frequency	Incremental R^2
Behavioral							
Vote Abstention	Young	-	-	-	.00	-.23[a]	(.054)[a]
		.03	-.15[c]	(.042)[b]	.02	-.19[b]	(.030)[b]
	Older	-	-	-	-.01	-.08	(.007)
		.04	-.20[b]	(.040)[b]	.02	-.05	(.002)
Unstable Party Affiliation	Young	-	-	-	-.15[b]	.11	(.036)[b]
		.07	-.14[c]	(.011)	-.16[b]	.15[b]	(.043)[b]
	Older	-	-	-	-.04	.06	(.004)
		-.08	-.22[a]	(.050)[b]	-.07	.10	
Openness to Alternatives	Young	-	-	-	-.19[a]	-.01	(.036)[b]
		-.14[c]	.04	(.015)	-.20[a]	.00	(.040)[b]
	Older	-	-	-	-.16[b]	-.01	(.025)
		.11	-.22[a]	(.063)[a]	-.10	.03	(.008)
Subjective							
Contingent Voting	Young	-	-	-	.12[c]	.02	(.014)
		.17[b]	-.19[b]	(.044)[b]	.12[c]	.06	(.017)
	Older	-	-	-	-.14[c]	.07	(.022)
		.06	-.13	(.021)	-.11	.10	(.016)
Anti-Party	Young	-	-	-	-.04	.06	(.006)
		-.05	-.25[a]	(.039)[b]	-.07	.16[b]	(.026)[b]
	Older	-	-	-	.19[b]	-.08	(.037)[b]
		-.22[b]	-.08	(.082)[a]	.08	-.06	(.008)
Conflict and Indecision	Young	-	-	-	-.30[a]	.05	(.092)[a]
		.15[b]	.22[a]	(.102)[a]	-.25[a]	-.04	(.064)[a]
	Older	-	-	-	-.21[a]	-.05	(.051)[b]
		.39[a]	.00	(.163)[a]	-.03	-.05	(.004)
Anti-Compromise	Young	-	-	-	.00	-.12	(.015)
		-.14[c]	.14[c]	(.024)[c]	.00	-.15[b]	(.020)
	Older	-	-	-	-.11	-.06	(.016)
		.06	-.18[b]	(.039)[b]	-.08	-.03	(.005)

N = 192 for young, 161 for older respondents. The first row in each block of two rows indicates the standardized regression coefficients for each media exposure variable controlling for the other media variable but not controlling for education or political interest. The second row indicates the contribution for each variable controlling for both media variables and for education and political interest. The incremental R^2 in the last column indicates the added variance accounted for by the two media variables over and above that accounted for by education and political interest. Significance is indicated at the .10 level by the letter c, at the .05 level by b, and at the .01 level by a.

TABLE 6

Behavioral and Subjective Volatility: Standardized Regression Coefficients of Education, Political Interest and Television and Newspaper Content Use

Volatility		Education	Political Interest	R^2	Television Public Affairs	Television Entertainment	Newspaper Public Affairs	Newspaper Entertainment	Incr. R^2
Behavioral									
Vote Abstention	Young	-	-	-	-.14[c]	-.05	-.21[a]	-.08	(.089)[a]
		.05	-.13	(.042)[b]	-.15[c]	-.03	-.15[c]	-.04	(.061)[b]
	Older	-	-	-	-.07	.10	-.13	-.08	(.046)
		.08	-.13	(.040)[b]	-.05	.12	-.08	-.08	(.022)
Unstable Party	Young	-	-	-	.07	-.01	-.08	.01	(.007)
		.11	-.04	(.011)	.05	.02	-.07	.02	(.006)
	Older	-	-	-	.19[b]	-.10	-.20[b]	.10	(.053)[c]
		-.05	-.23[b]	(.050)[b]	.19[b]	-.14	-.06	.09	(.039)
Openness to Alternatives	Young	-	-	-	-.16[b]	-.05	.25[a]	.07	(.075)[a]
		-.18[b]	-.08	(.015)	-.10	-.11	.31[a]	.05	(.089)[a]
	Older	-	-	-	-.01	.01	.01	-.05	(.002)
		.16	-.30[a]	(.063)[a]	.02	.05	.13	-.05	(.014)
Subjective									
Contingent Voting	Young	-	-	-	-.17	-.04	-.11	.03	(.054)[b]
		.23[a]	-.08	(.044)[b]	-.22[a]	.02	-.10	.07	(.057)[b]
	Older	-	-	-	-.14	-.07	-.15[c]	.01	(.058)[c]
		.08	-.01	(.021)	-.12	-.03	-.16[c]	.01	(.042)
Anti-Party	Young	-	-	-	.00	.02	-.01	.04	(.003)
		-.07	-.26[a]	(.039)[b]	.05	-.02	.12	.00	(.014)
	Older	-	-	-	.14	.12	-.04	.03	(.041)
		-.26[a]	-.16[c]	(.082)[a]	.11	-.01	.11	-.05	(.022)
Conflict and Indecision	Young	-	-	-	.00	-.17[b]	.15[c]	.02	(.062)[b]
		.17[b]	.22[a]	(.102)[a]	-.06	-.10	.03	.05	(.016)
	Older	-	-	-	-.10	-.15[c]	.06	.01	(.047)
		.43[a]	.04	(.163)[a]	-.05	.03	-.08	.04	(.008)
Anti-Compromise	Young	-	-	-	-.11	.05	.09	.07	(.018)
		-.13	.09	(.024)	-.08	.02	.06	.07	(.012)
	Older	-	-	-	-.15[c]	.00	-.04	.12	(.030)
		.09	-.20[b]	(.039)[b]	-.13	.02	.04	.11	(.023)

N = 192 for young, 161 for older respondents. The first row in each block of two rows indicates the standardized regression coefficients for each media exposure variable controlling for the other three media variables but not controlling for education or political interest. The second row indicates the contribution for each variable controlling for all other media variables and for education and political interest. The incremental R^2 in the last column indicates the added variance accounted for by the four media variables over and above that accounted for by education and political interest. Significance is indicated at the .10 level by the letter c, at the .05 level by b, and at the .01 level by a.